

Retired Doctor Tends to Institutionalized Elderly



Dr. Marc Saltzman
Volunteer Advocate at
Marcella Center in
Burlington

BY JOSEPH SHURE

After spending his working life healing people, Dr. Marc Saltzman is spending his retirement safeguarding elderly people from harm.

The Willingboro resident said he gets satisfaction from knowing he helps improve residents' lives.

"It just seemed like a good thing to do," said Marc, 79, a retired doctor.

Marc is one of 200 participants in the Volunteer Advocate Program, overseen by the Department of the Public Advocate's Ombudsman for the Institutionalized Elderly, which investigates reports of abuse and neglect of people age 60 and older living in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.

Acting as the eyes and ears of the Ombudsman's office, volunteers spend several hours a week visiting long-term care facilities, making sure residents receive the best possible care. Since the program's inception in 1993, volunteers have donated more than 50,000 hours to advocating on behalf of the state's institutionalized elderly.

This means attending to details that may seem insignificant to those unfamiliar with nursing home life. Marc checks residents' disposable drinking cups each time he visits to make sure they have not been used for longer than a day. He also ensures that reusable food and drink containers are sanitized regularly.

When Marc walks by the nurses' station, he checks to see that medicine carts are secured and the doors to rooms that hold hazardous materials are locked.

Many Volunteer Advocates see themselves as members of the same team as the staff of the facilities they visit. Both parties work to give residents the highest quality care possible. Marc praises



Chris Gaskins

Resident of
Marcella Center in
Burlington

the administration of the Marcella Center in Burlington as a compassionate, caring and responsive group of people.

The feeling is mutual.

“He’s excellent, we love him,” said Susan Pizzola, a nurse and the manager of the center’s sub-acute unit. “He keeps us on the straight and narrow.”

This sometimes means reminding residents to air their complaints. Marc said residents sometimes forget to bring their problems to the attention of the facility’s staff, so he makes it a point to ask them if anything is wrong.

“Not that I know of,” one resident replied to his inquiry.

“Well, you’re the one who would know,” Marc said.

Marc knows that, as a Volunteer Advocate, he is responsible not only for the residents with whom he can easily communicate, but also those who have a difficult time articulating their problems.

In some cases, residents have suffered such a degree of mental deterioration that they are unable to separate real problems from imagined. So Marc talks to family members and other residents to discover if a resident is experiencing any problems.

Both groups, he said, are sometimes more candid about revealing complaints a resident has, giving Marc a chance to solicit the necessary help from the staff.

“You just inquire,” he said. “And you have to observe.”

The bulk of the issues with which Marc helps residents are fixable. The staff can change the temperature of the room or provide a different selection of food.

**“Sometimes I’m
the only visitor
these people
have.”**

—Dr. Marc Saltzman

But some of the residents’ most pressing concerns deal with the transition to life in a long-term care facility.

“There are women who have been heads of their households,” he said. “It can be hard to adjust to living here, to having a roommate.”

This transition can be even more difficult when loneliness is added to the equation, making the role of volunteers more important still.

“Sometimes I’m the only visitor these people have,” he said.



Department of the Public Advocate
240 West State Street
P.O. Box 851
Trenton, NJ 08625
Phone: (609) 826-5090 Fax: (609) 984-4747

www.njpublicadvocate.gov
PublicAdvocate@advocate.state.nj.us



**The Public Advocate:
A Voice for the People**